Anderson

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'No Longer Can I Suppress My Outrage'

The Drew Pearson who in 1945 summoned me to a job interview by telegram, though I was only a few blocks away, was approaching the zenith of his fantastic career. He was an irrepressible idealist at the height of his influence, which he sometimes used to manipulate events.

The elegant Pearson, with his famous acquaintances, his dinner parties, finger bowls and wax-tipped mustache ends, and the gaudy world of postwar Washington to which he introduced me were a lot to drink in for a 24-year-old from the salt licks.

My beat was corruption in the nation's capital, and I was caught up in Drew's many crusades and vendettas.

Contrary to popular theology, there is nothing that produces as much exhilaration, zest for living and all-round gratification as a protracted, ugly, bitter-end vendetta that rages for years and comes close to ruining both sides. One of the secrets of Drew's resilience and buoyancy to the end of his life was his involvement in several of these mortal feuds.

I have never been able to develop enough enthusiasm for Democrats to resent Republicans the way Drew did, and I suffer from some phlegmatism of spirit that inhibits bitter personal animosities.

Drew developed a special hostility for Richard Nixon. Scarcely had the young Whig from Whittier made his first misrepresentation than Drew cast the evil eye on him. Yet I managed to get along quite affably with Nixon during his early congressional years.

After he ascended to the presidency, I espoused the spirit of Herblock who gave Nixon a free shave and made him look more presentable in The Washington Post cartoons. I, too, tried to humanize this dogged, dauntless President with the unfortunate sloping nose, the marionette hand gestures and the robot-like personality.

I knew Richard Nixon to be a deeply private person, a warm, shy, sensitive man, who sometimes woke up wondering whether he was President. "I would have a feeling," he told a friend, "that I had something to tell the President. Then I would suddenly shake myself awake and realize I am the President."

I tried to look beneath the psychological scar tissue he had accumulated as he drove himself into one bruising battle after another, slashing his way to the top, suffering inwardly from the political shellfire. I tried to understand this lonely, suspicious President who fought so hard for public approval and was rebuffed so often.

"While many still see Watergate as a 'third-rate burglary,' it was merely the key to a Pandora's box."

I knew how he must have felt during his sightseeing stop at a Leningrad castle after the Moscow summit meeting. The guide showed him a spot where the acoustics made a few hand pats sound like great applause. The President, euphoric over the success of his negotiations with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, announced: "I am going to applaud myself." He clapped his hands and beamed happily when the magnified applause roared back.

I joined in the applause over his triumphs in Moscow and Peking. I wrote about the Nixon of yesterday who waited in a boarding house most evenings to help a crippled college classmate up two flights of stairs, about the Nixon of today who secretly paid the tuition and expenses of two black college students.

But I sense the ghost of Drew Pearson hovering restlessly over my typewriter. He must be in a magnificent rage over the Watergate revelations, which confirm the worst he ever wrote about Richard Nixon.

Most of the controversial hypotheses that motivate muckrakers today, much lamented by the Spiro Agnews, are in reality the quintessence of the early American credo.

During my own childhood in the Utah of the 1930s, I swallowed great doses of patriotism, from which I still get periodic twinges. I was brought up to respect government and its processes. But I was also taught the sanctity of the Constitution and the primacy of laws over men, all of which placed limits upon the proper sphere of government.

No longer can I suppress my outrage over the abuse of power at the pinnacle. No longer can I permit my respect for the presidency to shut my eyes to the naked Nixon, the emperor stripped of his clothes by Watergate. No longer can I accept that Nixon was cut off from the truth, that he did not know what was going on in his own tight, little White House circle.

Drew Pearson sensed the fatal flaw in Nixon's character a quarter century ago. Drew was all too right about Nixon.

There are still many Americans who see the seemingly endless revelations of Watergate as the President once described it: "a third-rate burglary." But the burglary has been lost in the ple-

thora of dirty deeds; it was merely the key to a Pandora's box.

The Nixon coterie encroached upon the powers of Congress, trampled upon the rights of the press, violated our most basic freedoms. With eyes as cold as the marble around them, they sat in the witness chair in the Senate caucus room and arrogantly asserted what they called the President's right to steal and wiretap and rig court cases. They justified it all in the name of national security.

They goaded dissidents, encouraged demonstrations, rejoined over a report that there might be violence at a presidential function. "Good," scrawled White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman in response to the report that the demonstrators "will be violent; they will have extremely obscene signs."

Then to protect the nation from such demonstrators, the President and his people claimed the right to violate fundamental freedoms. There is even now pending in Congress a detailed Nixon proposal that would give him unprecedented powers in the name of national security.

The White House crowd, in short, have put national security ahead of the Constitution. The language of the Constitution — the people, justice, tranquility, welfare, liberty — would protect the people from the government. The language of the Nixonites — law and order, secrecy, surveillance, executive privilege — would protect the government from the people.

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